

# NIHOA MILLERBIRD

*(Acrocephalus familiaris kingi)*

So-named because of its affinity for moths called miller, the small secretive Nihoa Millerbird was first discovered in 1923.

**DISTRIBUTION:** Restricted to the 156 acres which make up the remote, rugged island of Nihoa, the Millerbirds and their finch neighbors each have one of the smallest distributions of any bird species.

**DESCRIPTION:** Nihoa Miller-birds are dark gray-brown above and buffy-white below. They are approximately 5 inches in length and have a thin dark-colored bill.

**VOICE:** The metallic and bubbling songs of the Nihoa Millerbird are not easily heard above the piercing calls of terns flying overhead and surf crashing on the rocks below.

**NESTING:** Nesting appears to occur when food is most abundant and may begin anytime between January and May. An average of two eggs are laid in nests of woven grasses and rootlets, well concealed in small shrubs.

**DIET:** Insects gleaned from foliage, stems, leaf litter, and the soil surface make up the diet of the Nihoa Millerbird.

**CONSERVATION NOTE:** The population of the Nihoa Millerbird has fluctuated in recent years between 200 and 600 birds. Its limited distribution within a relatively sensitive biological system magnifies the potential for disturbance to its population. This was demonstrated on Laysan Island when the Laysan Millerbird became extinct after introduced rabbits destroyed most of the vegetation. Introduced plants and animals pose a major threat to the survival of endemic birds on the remote northwestern Hawaiian islands. Insects or seeds can be accidentally introduced attached to clothing or shoes; and other exotics, particularly rodents, can be introduced by shipwreck. And once introduced, a plant or an animal with no natural predators or means of control can seriously disrupt an island ecosystem.

Fire, either natural or from human activities, poses another serious threat to the Nihoa Millerbird. In 1885 a fire was started by a large group of people visiting Nihoa from one of the main Hawaiian islands. The fire raged out of control and destroyed much of the vegetation covering the steep slopes and rough terrain.

An informed public will help to prevent such occurrences, but the threat of accidental introductions of plants and animals will always remain. As part of the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, and as a designated Research Natural Area, Nihoa Island has restricted access. Visitors must have a permit signed by the Refuge manager.



Nihoa Millerbird on Nihoa Island

-Photo by W.C. Gagne